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Oral History with Audrey Mae Hernandez

Audrey Mae Hernandez

TJ Joseph
University of San Diego

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Ethnic Studies Oral History Project

University of San Diego

Narrator: Audrey Mae Hernandez
Interview Date: September 23, 2023
Interview Location: PIFA, Ski Beach, San Diego, CA
Interviewed by: TJ Joseph
Duration: 5 minutes

Summary: In this oral history, Audrey Mae Hernandez talks about her mixed cultural upbringing, her experience and desire to continue her education, and what Island Grad means to her.

KEYWORDS

graduated, island, identify, culture, grad, guam, educational experiences, centered, san diego, family, colonialism, birth, baptist university, masters, today, education, food, native hawaiian pacific, research, history

TJ Joseph: 00:01

Today is September 23rd Saturday and we are at the Pacific Islander Festival day in San Diego, California. My name is TJ and I'm a student at the University of San Diego in the Ethnic Studies race and oral history class. Thank you for telling us your story today. Could you please tell us your name and date of birth?

Audrey Hernandez: 00:29

Sure. My name is Audrey Mae Hernandez, and my date of birth is August 1st 1989.

TJ: 00:34

Could you also tell us your place of birth?

AH: 00:37

Sure, I was born on Guam in the village of Barrigata.

TJ: 00:50

And so... we're recording this as a part of an educational series today, so do you give permission for Island Grad and to learn and possibly include your story on their website as well as USD to include your oral history in the free and accessible database on our website?.

AH: 00:58

Yes

TJ: 01:00

So let's begin with a question about how you identify, what Island or islands do you and your family identify as?

AH 01:11

So I definitely identify as an individual that's from Guam. As that is my birthplace, however, my family is also from the Philippines. So Philippines, Guam in the diaspora, as a whole is kind of where I identify and how I identify.

TJ 01:30

And how would you say that those identities intersect and play with one another?

AH 01:37

What's funny is that I find a lot of similarities in the food culture. I think it's really interesting because being born and raised on Guam, and then being born to Filipino parents and family, we share a very similar food culture. So like it's really really centered on like, celebration, good food, like good times, like partying, fiestas, just like this island grad. And those are where it kind of intersects quite a bit is through the food culture.

TJ 02:06

Kind of pivoting off of that, could you talk about your educational experiences. So if you could just tell us like any experience from any level of education that would be awesome.

AH 02:15

Certainly, I guess we'll start with the most recent. I'm currently a Doctorate of Social Work candidate at California Baptist University. My research focus is the implications of modern day colonialism on Native Hawaiian Pacific Islander college completion rates. And this is a very particular, this is a very important research topic for myself, because I do identify as NHPI. And I was affected quite negatively because of modern day colonialism and systemic roots and systemic

oppression. And being here today to speak with you as a doctoral candidate is just so it's just so surreal to me. Before that, I actually graduated with my masters of social work. So I'm currently practicing as a psychotherapist at a private practice as well. So, yeah.

TJ 03:03

And after going through your masters, and going on to get your doctorate, are there some things that you wish you had, or like, any knowledge before starting these experiences?

AH 03:14

For sure. First and foremost, it's money. I think that was the biggest barrier that kept me from pursuing education as a whole. A little bit more background about me is that it took me over 13 years to complete my undergrad. So, and that was because of financial instability. And I really wish that I knew more of my resources that were allotted to me as a minority and immigrant and a woman of color. And I wish that I just had more opportunities to learn more about what that is and not be scared and pursue more of that. So yeah, that was like one of the biggest things that I wish that I knew in my educational journey.

TJ 03:56

Thank you for sharing that. And How do you think Island grad and the island grad ceremony could best recognize future graduates, or say, like you're finishing your program? Like how would you want to be celebrated in that aspect?

AH 04:07

Yeah, funny enough. I'm actually an island grad alum. So when I graduated with my MSW, Fran and I, which is the executive director of island grad, we ended up meeting before me graduating. So I am an alumni of island grad. And one thing that I can say about this ceremony specifically, which is what I want to bring forward into the future, is that they were so centered on our culture. However you identify, so it was just one of those things that I want to continue as a legacy moving forward as a Program Director of this of this beautiful nonprofit organization. It's just to center of everything on our culture, on our family, on our ancestral understanding and lineage, so that we can further that knowledge into our next generation.

TJ 04:54

Awesome. Thank you so much. That's all the questions I have and thank you so much for sharing everything with me today. I really appreciate it

AH 04:59

It's my pleasure, thanks so much, TJ.